

March 21, 1956

Dear Allen:

As I promised at the IAC meeting yesterday, I am attaching a preliminary and draft version of an analysis of the Campaign Against Stalin, much along the lines of the discussion at the meeting. The rapid movement of daily events may, of course, overtake some of this reasoning at any time.

I hope this will be helpful in your preparation for briefing the NSC.

Sincerely yours,

W. Park Armstrong, Jr.

encl.

Draft paper on the  
Campaign Against Stalin  
(Official Use Only)

The Honorable  
Allen W. Dulles,  
Director of Central Intelligence,  
Washington.

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CAMPAIGN AGAINST STALIN

1. The current campaign to denigrate Stalin marks a major development with potentially far-reaching repercussions.
  - a. Although the text of Krushchev's secret speech still remains unpublished, the Party Congress speeches and subsequent Soviet and Communist actions point toward an all-out campaign to smash the symbol of Stalin's infallibility. Nearly 30 years of Soviet life has thus been opened to question.
  - b. Criticism of Stalin thus far has involved an attempt to separate his good conduct from his bad conduct. If Krushchev's reported indictment is publicized, however, Stalin's merits will probably be outweighed by his demerits.
  - c. The criticism has been largely focussed on the ill effects of one-man rule -- Stalin's mistakes and successes -- not on basic Soviet policies, such as forced industrialization, collectivization, high level of defense -- all of which his successors have reaffirmed.
2. The Soviet rulers did not undertake the action lightly, since it involves certain risks.
  - a. The psychological jolt to followers at home and abroad creates additional discipline problems and requires deep personal readjustments. There is already evidence of disbelief, uncertainty, confusion, embarrassment, and anger over the criticism of Stalin. (Georgian riots are still unconfirmed.)
  - b. Criticism of parts of Stalin's performance could open the way for the questioning of past issues and policies in all facets of Soviet and Communist life. Rehabilitation of some Communists raises the possibility that others might seek to even old scores.
  - c. Since the present rulers were closely associated with Stalin, they run the risk of being personally implicated in his mistakes and excesses, despite their presumed plan of being under duress.
3. The Soviet rulers, by undertaking the action, appeared to be confident that they could control negative reactions.
  - a. They have generally sought to prepare the Soviet population for the action.

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- (1) The symbol of Stalin has been subject to shrinking process during three years since his death. However, as late as January, Stalin was publicly treated as a positive symbol.
- (2) Initial treatment at the Congress showed sensitivity to public reactions; severest criticism confined to secret session, followed by closed meetings of Party workers throughout country, presumably to prepare Party rank and file for public indoctrination of population. No direct criticism of Stalin has appeared in the press since the Congress, but some of his pictures have been removed in Moscow.
- (3) Whether Krushchev's secret speech had been planned in advance is open to question. Possibly the mixed reactions of the delegates to the initial criticism of Stalin induced Krushchev to go beyond his original intentions.

b. They appear to be counting upon positive results to offset initial negative reactions.

- (1) Within the USSR, criticism of Stalin should be popular with large groups (intellectuals, economic managers, professional military).
- (2) Outside the USSR, both the Soviet Union and foreign Communist parties should ultimately appear more respectable and acquire greater political appeal with some groups.

4. In undertaking the attack on Stalin, the Soviet rulers appear to be moving from free choice rather from compulsion.

- a. There is no evidence to indicate that the Soviet rulers were forced to undertake the criticism of Stalin because of internal pressures, political or economic. Indeed, the post-Congress decree on collective farms marks an increase in pressure on the peasants.
- b. Similarly there is no evidence to indicate that the Soviet rulers regard any foreign developments as compelling them to jettison the symbol of Stalin.

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5. A number of considerations appear to have played a motivating role.

- a. The desire to establish their own identity by a dramatic break with the past; the desire of some of the current rulers to forestall a future Stalin by censuring the "cult of personality"; personal animosity toward Stalin; potential gains in popularity at home and respectability abroad -- all doubtless were involved.
- b. The attack on Stalin certainly gives the USSR greater freedom of action to pursue its current emphasis on coexistence by making for an appearance of consistency between its symbols and its avowed intentions.
- c. At the same time, a more basic consideration appears to be present. If the USSR is to be operated without a Stalin, then a different type of general response from the population is required. Under one-man rule, those below are expected simply to obey; they lack any feeling of participation and are fearful of taking responsibility. If the political and economic machinery is to be revitalized, then there is a need for the lower ranks to accept responsibility and take initiative in the economic tasks ahead. The criticism of Stalin would serve to check the Party and population into an awareness that a new response is expected.
- d. Before the criticism of Stalin, his successors have been moving in this direction. Without diluting their monopoly of political power, they have sought to decentralize some governmental and economic functions, brought the police under Party control, and stressed the need for legality to diminish the threat of arbitrary coercion, and in general brought about a reduction in the atmosphere of tension of Stalin's time.

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